

**New York State Education Department  
IMLS Connecting to Collections Planning Grant Proposal  
Narrative**

**Partnership for New York's Cultural Heritage**

**1. Need and Rationale**

New York lays claim to an unparalleled breadth, volume, and density of collecting institutions—museums, libraries, historical societies and archival institutions, which, under charter by the University of the State of New York, steward collections that span four centuries. These are unique, tangible documents and cultural objects, as well as a growing body of electronic collections. New York's cultural collections form an incomparable resource for a students and culture and history—a resource worthy of the utmost care.

New York has long invested in the preservation of its cultural resources. Three New York State cultural heritage institutions: the New York State Museum (NYSM), New York State Library (NYSL), and New York State Archives (NYSA) have led this effort as stewards of the collections of the people of New York and as providers of services and funds to cultural institutions statewide. The State Museum, founded in 1836 and one of the nation's earliest, is a major research and education institution dedicated to preserving New York's rich cultural, historical, and environmental legacies. An 1890 law authorized the NY State Board of Regents to charter or incorporate museums, historical societies, and related cultural agencies and since the mid 1980s, the State Museum has provided oversight and assistance to museums and historical societies statewide through its Museum Chartering Office. Under the leadership of Melvil Dewey, the State Library was one of the very first to address preservation in its mission. In 1984, the State Library spearheaded legislation to establish ongoing support for the library community statewide and has distributed over 40 million dollars in preservation grants. Today the State Library's Conservation/Preservation Grant Program is regarded "the model/gold standard" to which other states aspire. The State Archives, founded just 30 years ago, has in its short history demonstrated leadership in the preservation of its holdings as well as considerable support for the management of archives and records collections statewide through in-person advisory services, workshops, and grants totaling over 168 million dollars, of which more than 50 million have gone toward preservation and microfilming.

These three institutions, with the Office of Public Broadcasting, make up the New York State Education Department's Office of Cultural Education (OCE). Among them, they have invested close to 100 million dollars in preservation of collections statewide and provided countless preservation workshops, site visits, surveys, and disaster aid, among many other preservation services. However, despite their common goals and overlapping constituencies, these three institutions have seldom collaborated to assess and respond to the preservation needs of the cultural heritage community in New York. This *Connecting to Collections* proposal is OCE's first effort to combine forces to systematically and comprehensively reach out to the stewards of New York's cultural resources.

Another New York State agency, the New York State Council for the Arts (NYSCA) has also served and supported the cultural heritage community, through museum advancement and conservation grants administered by the Upstate History Alliance and the Lower Hudson Conference, respectively.

In partnership with NYSCA and others, OCE seeks a planning grant to fund a survey/assessment of cultural collections statewide to determine the preservation needs of museums, libraries, archives, and other eligible organizations in the new millennium. This project affords a unique opportunity for the

programs of OCE and other cultural heritage organizations to work collaboratively in reaching out to our constituents in the state.

Focused canvassing of New York's cultural heritage community has been carried out several times in past decades, but our data on institutions' needs are out of date and incomplete. Selected previous needs assessment efforts include the following:

- Our Memory at Risk (OMAR), 1985-1988. This project, funded in part by National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and carried out by the New York State Archives and New York State Library, assessed preservation needs of archives and libraries and staged regional preservation workshops and meetings. OMAR identified preservation needs statewide, helped establish relationships among stakeholders in the archival/library community, and spurred the passage of legislation supporting libraries and archives.
- New York State Library, Conservation/Preservation Program, Survey of Repositories, 1996. This survey of 439 institutions, including public and academic libraries, archives, historical societies, and museums, probed levels of preservation activity and education needs. Responders identified preservation of archives and "nonbook" formats and disaster preparedness as priority education areas. Sixty-two percent of responders stated that they lacked disaster plans.
- New York State Historical Records Advisory Board, Survey of Historical Records Repositories, 1999. This survey of 856 archives, historical societies, academic and public libraries, and museums investigated the state of archival management and practice in responding institutions. Preservation-related findings mirror earlier survey results, with 75% of responders lacking a disaster plan and preservation and computer training cited as priorities.
- Heritage Health Index, Heritage Preservation, 2005. The ca. 200 New York repositories responding to this nation-wide survey funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) included archives, libraries, and museums. This survey yielded the most comprehensive, systematically gathered preservation data of any of the New York studies. It tells us that New York repositories' need for improved environmental controls, better storage, and preservation education exceeds the national average. This survey and the resultant data will serve as the foundation for proposed data gathering efforts, because of their currency and high quality.
- Council of State Archivists (CoSA) Assessment of Emergency Preparedness for State Archives and Records Management Programs, 2006. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, CoSA developed this self-assessment that asked all 50 state archives and records management programs a series of probing questions about emergency preparedness in their state. Results revealed a national shortage of emergency skills and knowledge to secure and recover essential records.
- Lower Hudson Conference (LHC) Member Survey and Constituent Profiles, 2006. LHC surveyed over 300 institutions in the Hudson Valley and New York City to assess their organization's services. One hundred twenty-five libraries, archives, and museums responding to the survey identified collections management (care and handling, emergency planning, and access) as their most critical training need.
- Conservation Treatment Grant Program, administered by LHC, 2000-2006. This on-going evaluation of Conservation Treatment Grant Program-funded projects has yielded data on New York's collecting

organizations' budgets, personnel, conservation planning, and professional development training for selected repositories among more than 1,200 eligible ones.

The New York State-gathered data consistently show a cross-cutting need for help with emergency preparedness, preservation, and management of electronic ("nonbook") media. However, the results are neither sufficiently detailed nor current enough to be relied on for decision-making and action. Most of the survey efforts were conducted by library or archives organizations. While they often reached museums, museum professionals did not participate in survey design or deployment, underscoring the limited collaboration. We lack data for small repositories, one of our largest and most underserved communities. Finally, the data do not touch collections that are born digital, digital surrogates, computerized collection management systems, or websites. As collections become increasingly digital and dependent on computer technology, this omission becomes all the more serious. In contrast, the HHI survey was developed by a diverse group of cultural heritage practitioners, including museum professionals, reached a diverse range of repository types, and queried institutions regarding electronic and audiovisual collections. It depicts the cultural heritage landscape in broad strokes but does not provide the detail necessary for planning. We know that evidence is key to effecting improvements in collections stewardship statewide and that armed with current data on New York-based collections and their risks, the challenges facing the organizations holding them, and better coverage of museum objects and artifacts, we can do great things.

OCE is uniquely positioned to take on this statewide planning project. Although our state is large (50,000 square miles) and our collections many (over 5,000 collecting institutions, including museums, libraries, historical records repositories, and local governments), we have built networks between OCE and the cultural heritage community and among our constituents that will make survey deployment and follow-up manageable. OCE and its partners have strong relationships with repositories statewide through our grant programs, field staff, and relationships with the regional history and professional organizations. The State Archives stations staff in nine regions statewide to deliver archives and records services; OCE will use a regional approach to delivering assistance to cultural heritage institutions responding to our survey. Our proposed partners for this project demonstrate the breadth of our networks, which will provide the necessary infrastructure for action.

## **2. The Planning Process**

*Survey.* On September 7, 2007, OCE staff convened a meeting of stakeholders to discuss the proposal and invite their suggestions and support. The executive directors of the New York Library Association and Museum Association of New York, the curator of the Rensselaer County Historical Society, the acting director of the Upstate History Alliance, and the Chautauqua County Historian attended. At the meeting, we agreed that OCE and our partners, as leaders in the New York cultural community, share responsibility for improving collections stewardship statewide. In order to do this, we need to learn directly from the cultural heritage community the factors that impede progress in tackling their preservation problems.

Our plan is to develop and implement a survey that elicits detailed information about the preservation needs of cultural heritage institutions throughout the state. The survey will build on the HHI data by probing deeper into institutions' needs and by reaching a greater number of repositories.

We will investigate the range, volume, and condition of New York collections; risks to collections; existing resources to care for them; the staff (paid and volunteer) who manage collections; challenges facing cultural heritage organizations; and current access to education and education needs. We know from previous surveys, especially HHI, that disaster planning and education are priorities. Our survey

will hone in on cultural heritage institutions' need for education—both content and delivery. We will seek to better understand the obstacles to receiving training including cost, travel time, and time away from work. Our constituents will have an opportunity to tell us what educational formats work for them: site visits, publications, workshops, or online training. This knowledge will ultimately help us develop training that is accessible and affordable. We will explore the need and best practices for delivering assistance in preservation surveys and planning, emergency preparedness, disaster aid, security, environmental control, advocacy, and funding.

The survey will result in a statewide action plan with measurable outcomes. With our consultant, OCE and its partners will analyze the data and develop a report that details the condition and preservation needs of heritage collections across the state and makes recommendations for action with timeframe, responsibilities, outcomes, and budget identified. Administering the survey in partnership will foster enduring coordination, collaboration, and cross-training.

### **3. Project Resources: Budget and Personnel**

*OCE staff.* A team of OCE staff will coordinate and manage the project. (Project co-directors include Barbara Lilley, director of the State Library's Conservation/Preservation Program and Maria Holden, chief of the State Archives repository and state-wide archival services. David Palmquist, head of the State Museum Chartering Office will serve as museum liaison.) They will have responsibility for consultant relations, survey development and data analysis, partner/advisor relationships, preparation of the preservation plan, and reporting to IMLS and the field. OCE staff is ultimately responsible for project results, including sustaining collaboration among New York's cultural heritage community and implementing the statewide preservation plan. OCE information technology staff will develop and release the web-base survey application and provide technical assistance throughout the project. OCE fiscal and clerical staff will provide budgeting and accounting support, create mailing lists, and assist with distribution of the survey and promotional materials.

*Consultants.* We will engage the services of an experienced consultant to help project staff draft and deploy the survey. The consultant team, which will be led by preservation management consultant Tom Clareson of PALINET, joined by a statistics and marketing expert, will develop survey content, collect the responses, analyze results, and provide a written report. Mr. Clareson brings 15 years of experience developing and analyzing statewide and regional preservation survey documents and other market research studies of cultural heritage institutions. Please see attached proposal from PALINET. We also propose hiring a graduate information studies student to perform data entry and assist with the administration of the survey.

*Partners.* We have assembled a team of project partners, who with OCE represent the full range of service-providers to the cultural heritage community in New York. The partners include regional historical agency service providers and professional and educational organizations. Our partners will participate in developing survey content and planning its delivery. They will share directories, listservs, and mailing lists for survey distribution and publicity. They will also assist with promoting the survey among their constituents and hold regional meetings with prospective responders to guide them through the process. They will also help project staff ensure that the underserved, smaller repositories are reached. At the close of the project, they will participate in crafting the statewide plan addressing the needs identified in the survey. Our partners include the following organizations:

Partners	
• New York State Council on the Arts	• New York Archives Conference
• Lower Hudson Conference	• New York Library Association
• Museum Association of New York	• Upstate History Alliance

*Advisors.* Project staff will appoint a team of advisors to provide expert advice on survey development, content, and distribution. This team will consist of individuals who are leaders in the field of preservation needs assessment and planning as well as curators and other professionals with responsibility for collections.

*Outreach.* Because of OCE's statewide responsibilities for cultural resources, we maintain comprehensive, computerized lists of customers and constituents. Our directories, supplemented by those of our partners, will enable us to reach out to virtually every repository in the state to invite and encourage their participation. During the survey period, we will prod survey recipients via reminder email and postcards. Immediately following survey release, we will hold regional meetings to which all recipients will be invited. The purpose of these meetings will be to answer questions about the survey and help responders fill it out. Our partners committee will host these meetings with assistance from OCE staff. It is our intention to web mount the survey on a State Education Department server and to provide links to it from OCE and partners' websites.

Our ultimate goal is to obtain the information we need to build a comprehensive, statewide preservation plan. The plan will identify priorities for training as well as training delivery options that meet the needs and budgets of the New York cultural resources community. New York's plan will become the blueprint for statewide preservation action, including education, and will forge relationships and partnerships across repository types, geographical regions, governments, and private organizations. This plan will set the course for preservation action for years to come, thus ensuring sustainability and consistency of action. It will drive future fundraising and legislative efforts, without which progress will be stalled. We expect that we will apply for a *Connecting to Collections* Implementation Grant to advance selected recommendations. However, even if we do not receive that grant, New York's preservation blueprint will endure and guide future efforts.

Toward sustaining the partnership that the project guarantees, we are committed to connecting and nurturing a network of preservation advisors and advocates, including the New York State Records Advisory Board, the Regents Advisory Council, and other influential stakeholders. We propose maintaining this network via web-based tools to facilitate regular meetings and communication. The long-term benefits of such a consortium of advocates include making collaboration the standard way of doing business, benchmarking, and ultimately, an even greater investment in New York's cultural heritage.